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Lafayette Apartments Residents Voice Health, Safety Concerns

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All the residents of Lafayette Apartments on Harrison Lane want is a clean, safe place to live.

Wednesday night, V.O.I.C.E. (Virginians Organized for Interfaith Community Engagement) hosted a meeting with residents and Lee Supervisor Jeff McKay to demand that the owners, Maine-based Eagle Point Management LLC, bring the property, which is financed by the Virginia Housing and Development Authority, up to code. V.O.I.C.E. leaders, including Rev. Keary Kincannon, pastor of Rising Hope United Methodist Mission Church and Rev. Tuck Bowerfind, pastor at St. Luke's Episcopal Church, claim that Lafayette residents "are living with unhealthy conditions and safety violations in private and common spaces, and an unresponsive management." Rod Littlepage, president of Eagle Point Management, did not respond to an e-mail seeking comment on the issue.

At the meeting, resident Stephany Messina said they first brought their concerns to the VDHA and McKay in August and on Oct. 27 met in McKay's office with Littlepage and the property manager. "During this meeting, we presented Mr. Littlepage with a list of maintenance requests from 51 apartments and on that day Littlepage committed to addressing their demands within a month's time. Messina said since this summer, V.O.I.C.E. and resident leaders have knocked on more than 100 doors and listened to residents' complaints of poor maintenance, such as washers and dryers that never work, leaks that are never repaired, mold and cockroach and rat infestations. "Many of us worry about the health and safety of our children when buildings are unsecured, light bulbs need replacing, and playground equipment is broken," she said. Resident Paola Bernal said more than a month later, residents are disappointed that all of the work promised has not been done. She acknowledged that some issues have been addressed, but "there is still a lot of work to be done." She said the buildings have cockroaches, bedbugs and rats and that intercoms don't work and it's not uncommon to find homeless people sleeping in the laundry areas. "This is unacceptable to us," Bernal said. "We continue to feel unsafe." She said management "treats residents with disrespect" and the residents just expect to receive the services they pay for with their rent money.



Lafayette resident Jacqueline Figueroa, right, spoke in Spanish of her concerns about her apartment. Her speech was translated into English by Jeanne Crowley from V.O.I.C.E.

Resident Jacqueline Figueroa said a week after moving in more than two years ago, she found out her then 3-year-old daughter had cancer. During her time there, she and her daughter have had to put up with filthy carpeting, sewage backups and mold on the walls. She said she knew that McKay, who also has a young daughter, would never let his daughter live in conditions such as that.

McKay said that county code enforcement officers will most certainly be inspecting the property for code violations and will be forcing management to fix them. He did express a concern that if management did not fix the code violations in a timely manner, the apartment could be deemed unfit for habitation and the tenant would be evicted, something, of course, he does not want to see happen. McKay said code violations include anything of a life safety nature such as unprotected electrical wires, a lack of fire extinguishers, and sewage backups. He did stress to the residents, however, that many of the concerns residents were bringing up, such as filthy carpeting, is not a code violation but a tenant/management issue that might have to be worked out through the county's tenant/ landlord commission. Kincannon asked McKay to make sure that county code compliance begins a thorough investigation of Lafayette Apartments by Christmas and asked would he return before the end of January to deliver a detailed report on the results of that investigation? McKay said he would be willing to come back after code inspectors have issued a report, but couldn't commit on when that would be, noting that a lot of it depends on residents being willing to let the inspectors into their apartments to see the conditions. "The code inspectors are ready to go," McKay said.